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Sixty-eighth year

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6906th meeting

Wednesday, 23 January 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Masood Khan/Mr. Tarar	(Pakistan)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Oyarzábal
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Sharifov
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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13-21446 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Egypt, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Namibia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: Allow me to start by congratulating the new members of the Security Council at the start of their term. Let me also welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Malki, and the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Ron Prosor.

We meet today against the backdrop of ongoing events in the Middle East that could affect the peace process itself. Israel held elections yesterday, and Jordan is holding elections today. The United States Administration also commenced a second term this week.

While the process of forming a Government in Israel could take weeks, we look forward to engaging the next Israeli Government in the common pursuit of peace. This is not a time to be idle. Instead, we are entering a critical period in which concerted action will be vital if we are to salvage the two-State solution. The Secretary-General has repeatedly highlighted the fact that 2013 will be a decisive year for the two-State solution and that the parties must now show the political will to cooperate with new renewed effort to achieve it.

I recently visited Egypt and Jordan — two key Arab stakeholders with peace treaties with Israel — and my interlocutors reiterated their direct interest in assisting the parties to realize the two-State solution at long last, and their concern over the dire regional consequences if not movement is achieved. Regional and international partners are increasingly alarmed that the only way to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with resolutions and international law is slipping away. They have also questioned the effectiveness of international efforts to bring about decisive results.

The Quartet envoys met again on 10 January in Amman, Jordan. Everyone recognized the urgent need for action, but I must express my genuine concern that a clear and realistic path ahead is still lacking. The United Nations will remain an integral part of efforts to urgently address the dangerous political vacuum, and we are willing to work with any initiative that will achieve our common goal, including in the context of the Quartet. We have also taken note of the European Union (EU) Council decision of 10 December that reaffirmed the EU's vision for a way forward. We look forward in particular to renewed United States engagement.

No international effort alone is sufficient for progress absent the requisite will on the part of the parties

themselves. If they want to provide themselves and others with the opportunity to get on track in the period ahead, then now is not the time for actions that further undermine mutual trust. As previously reported, after the General Assembly accorded Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations, we witnessed developments such as a dramatic increase in Israeli settlements announcements, including in the critical E-1 area, and the withholding and redirection by Israel of tax revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, which have been widely deplored, including by the United Nations. President Abbas has warned that building in E-1 is a red line and that if plans proceed he would consider raising his opposition in international forums, including the International Criminal Court. I urge both sides to abstain from actions that will make efforts to resume meaningful negotiations even harder in the critical period ahead, and I call on Israel to restore the timely, predictable and transparent transfers of tax and customs revenues without further delay.

The withholding of clearance revenues has already seriously weakened the capacity of the Palestinian Government to meet its obligations. Key among these is the payment of salaries to civil servants, who have only received partial salaries since November and launched strikes in protest since mid-December. The Government also ended the refugee exemption from paying for electricity, which resulted in protests and clashes with Palestinian security on 1 January in Nablus.

In 2012, the recurrent budget deficit of the Palestinian Authority exceeded $1 billion. International contributions amounted to $600 million in support of the recurrent budget last year, but further timely disbursement of aid is essential to sustain institution-building and prevent the disruption of core operations. I welcome reports of the recent contribution from Saudi Arabia and statements of support by some Gulf States during yesterday's Riyadh summit, but members of the League of Arab States have yet to provide financial assistance pursuant to their communiqué of 9 December, and I urge them to do so urgently and to heed to the appeals of Prime Minister Fayyad. At the same time, we should be under no illusion — the viability of the Palestinian Authority will be increasingly at stake if its standing is based on political quicksand. Ultimately, there is no future for the Palestinian Authority without a two-State solution.

All this is taking place amid worrying events and trends on the ground, including continued settlement construction and increased violence. In East Jerusalem, on 19 December plans to approve 2,600 units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos were advanced, and 1,242 units were approved on 25 December in the settlement of Gilo. On 19 December, Israeli authorities advanced a plan to build 523 units in the Gush Etzion settlement south-west of Bethlehem. On 16 January, there were further tenders issued for construction in Efrat and Kiryat Arba, near Hebron. The reporting period also witnessed continued activity in Palestinian neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, including Beit Safafa and related to the construction of a military academy on the Mount of Olives. Israeli security forces demolished 105 structures in the occupied West Bank during the reporting period, resulting in the displacement of 170 Palestinians. Settlement construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law and cannot prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations. Clashes between settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank resulted in 14 Palestinian casualties, including one girl who was shot dead this morning near Hebron.

The reporting period has been characterized by increased Israeli operations — a total of 379 — and arrests in the West Bank, both of which are up nearly 90 per cent compared to the last reporting period, as well as increased clashes and renewed protests over the fate of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. There are also continuing signs of tensions in security coordination, including the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) arrest of one Palestinian security officer at a checkpoint near Nablus. As a result of the operations, two Palestinians, including a teenager, were killed, 158 injured and 379 arrested. Four Israeli soldiers were also injured. Increased use of live fire by Israeli security forces has been reported in the West Bank and is of concern.

On 1 and 3 January, undercover Israeli operations, in one instance to arrest a member of Islamic Jihad, resulted in clashes with civilians injured by live ammunition. On 25 December, Israeli security forces arrested 10 members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in Ramallah and other West Bank villages. Two of them allegedly confessed to planning to kidnap Israelis in order to force the release of PFLP leader Ahmad Saadat.

Palestinian attacks on Israeli security forces in the West Bank included throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, in one instance against an IDF post at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem on 27 December. A repeat

attempt was thwarted by Palestinian security forces on 1 January. On 5 January, Palestinian security forces arrested members of a Palestinian group in Hebron that had announced a third intifada and threatened to abduct IDF soldiers. Palestinian security forces also intervened in several refugee camps to prevent some members of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades from rearming and reverting to armed resistance. Demonstrations in Ramallah over the alleged Israeli mistreatment of Palestinian prisoners led to clashes with Palestinian security forces on 20 January. We continue to be concerned about the fate of Palestinian prisoners on administrative detention in Israeli jails, especially those on prolonged hunger strike.

All of these events paints a grim picture and, absent a new perspective on the political track, I fear that such negative trends will only worsen.

Palestinian demonstrations continued to be organized against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. On 11 January, over 100 Palestinians and international activists moved to the E-1 area of the West Bank and established an encampment named Bab al-Shams — or "Gateway to the Sun" — consisting of over 20 large tents, aimed at countering Israeli plans to expand settlement construction there. Demonstrators were evicted in the early hours of 13 January. On 18 January, the Secretariat received a letter from Ambassador Prosor in which he considered the incident as "a provocation staged against Israel". The Secretary-General has expressed his grave disappointment about the announced plans for Israeli settlement construction in the so-called E-1 area and repeated his call that such plans must be rescinded. The Secretary-General also stresses the importance for protests to continue to remain peaceful and for the right to peaceful protest to be fully respected. Another encampment named Bab Al-Karamah — Gateway to Dignity — was set up on 18 January in the Palestinian village of Beit Iksa, between Jerusalem and Ramallah, to impede the construction of the barrier on village land. The encampment was subsequently dismantled by Israeli security forces on 21 January.

In Gaza the calm brokered by Egypt in November has largely held, but remains tenuous. It is significant to report that no rockets or mortar shells landed in Israel during the reporting period, and only one rocket has landed in Israel since the end of November. Israeli forces conducted three incursions into Gaza during this period and fired six tank shells. One Palestinian civilian was killed and 10 Palestinian civilians were injured by Israeli fire, mostly while attempting to approach the border fence. I traveled to Cairo last week to continue our close work with Egyptian authorities to encourage further progress on all aspects of the understanding for the ceasefire.

As part of its commitments in the understanding reached, Israel began to allow gravel for commercial use through the Kerem Shalom crossing. In the past month 551 trucks, carrying more than 38,000 tons of gravel, entered Gaza. Israel has also allowed Palestinian farmers access up to 100 metres from the fence with Israel, and Palestinian fishermen have been able to access up to six nautical miles from shore. That is important progress. However, a further extension of the fishing limit to at least nine nautical miles is necessary for a significant increase in the catch of the fishermen. We also continue to call for the unrestricted entry of all construction materials. Assessments of damage to residential properties and civilian infrastructure resulting from the escalation in November 2012 highlight the urgent need to remove the ongoing restrictions. Further measures to lift the closure should include transfers of goods between Gaza and the West Bank, exports to Israel and beyond and, as needed, increased capacity at Kerem Shalom and the reopening of the Sufa crossing. To further advance that important agenda and address Israel's legitimate security interests, it is essential that efforts continue in parallel to enforce the calm and prevent the smuggling of weapons into Gaza.

In a new development, since 29 December, Egypt has allowed the entry of an average of 30 trucks per day carrying construction materials through the Rafah crossing for a range of Qatar-funded projects.

Implementing resolution 1860 (2009) in full also means overcoming the Palestinian divide. In that regard, President Abbas met with Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal on 10 January in Cairo to discuss the implementation of previous Palestinian reconciliation deals. On 17 January, members of Fatah and Hamas held in Cairo the first of what is intended to become a series of regular meetings. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) temporary body that includes all PLO factions as well as the leaders of groups outside of the PLO is expected to meet in early February. In addition, both sides have made positive gestures, as Fatah was permitted to hold an anniversary rally in Gaza earlier

this month, following the Hamas anniversary rallies in the West Bank during the previous reporting period. Reconciliation and negotiations remain essential for achieving the two-State solution. The peace process and reconciliation is not an either-or proposition and must be made compatible by advancing both in a mutually reinforcing way. But for real progress to be made, the time has come for Hamas to make clear where it stands on the central issues at stake.

Turning now to Syria, I will be succinct, as the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, will brief the Council at the end of this month.

The conflict, now in its twenty-second month, continues unabated. Nearly 60,000 persons were killed between 15 March 2011 and 30 November 2012. Thousands remain in detention. Many have suffered torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence. Indiscriminate shelling, armed clashes and the general state of insecurity have driven more than 670,000 Syrians outside the country. There are now more than 18,000 Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria being hosted in Lebanon, assisted by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, up from 10,000 in early December, as well as 3,200 in Jordan. More than 67,000 Iraqi refugees from Syria have had to return to Iraq. Since mid-December Yarmouk Camp, a Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus, has been the site of fighting between Syrian rebels and gunmen loyal to the Government, leading to massive displacement of the camp's population.

On 21 January, the Secretary-General and the Joint Special Representative expressed deep disappointment and anguish at the appalling levels of killing and destruction carried out by both the Government and the opposition, fuelled by outside Powers providing weaponry to both sides. They also expressed their consternation about the lack of a unified international posture that could lead to a transition as agreed at Geneva last June and put an end to the desperate suffering of the Syrian people.

The United Nations is doing its utmost to assist all in need inside and outside Syria. The Secretary-General will chair a high-level donor conference in Kuwait on 30 January to support our humanitarian assistance programmes. We are hopeful that Member States will contribute generously to bridge the funding gap.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) remains volatile. Armed clashes between the Syrian army and armed opposition take place sporadically inside the area of separation, posing risks to the ceasefire between Israel and Syria as well as to the safety and security of civilians and UNDOF personnel. That situation clearly jeopardizes regional stability and the ceasefire between the two countries. We have repeatedly called on both sides to respect the Disengagement Agreement.

The situation in Lebanon has been relatively quiet since last month's briefing, in spite of persisting tensions linked with the ongoing conflict in Syria. In Tripoli the Lebanese Armed Forces continued to maintain calm between the Sunni and Alawite communities of Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. There was, however, an attack on the convoy of the Minister of Youth on 18 January, in which 11 were injured. One 11-year-old Lebanese boy was killed by gunfire coming from Syria on 25 December, but generally the bad weather and heavy snow in the border region contributed to a decrease in violence and in smuggling activity. The nine Lebanese pilgrims who have remained in the custody of Syrian opposition forces since May 2012 have still not been released. The bodies of some 10 of the fighters killed in the Tel Kalakh incident on 30 November were returned for burial in Lebanon, and at least one Lebanese fighter is believed to be held by Syrian Government forces.

As a result of the continued political stalemate between the two main blocs, the session of the national dialogue scheduled for 7 January was postponed indefinitely by President Sleiman, who continues to hold consultations with all parties. Members of a parliamentary subcommittee started a series of meetings on 8 January to discuss the different proposed drafts of a new electoral law. It is a positive development that the parties are working together constructively in that manner. We hope that broad consensus will emerge over a new law. It is important that elections be held on time, in accordance with the Constitution and for the stability of the country.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon remained generally quiet and stable. Israeli violations of the Lebanese airspace continued on a frequent basis.

In conclusion, given internal political calendars, we have weeks to prepare for a new initiative. Israeli and Palestinian leaders have stated, like us, that they

are convinced that the two-State solution is the only path towards a durable peace. But they should realize that, absent serious engagement, the peace process will remain on life-support and stability on the ground will be put at risk even further. The consequences of inaction could be dire for everyone. The parties must therefore not only remain open to new initiatives to overcome the current impasse, they must also demonstrate their seriousness. If Israel is serious about the two-State solution, it must recognize the negative impact of continued settlement construction. Palestinian seriousness could be demonstrated by pausing further action in the international arena while talks begin.

Both parties must reaffirm their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, one that would fulfil resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), resolve the core issues — territory, security, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and water — and constitute the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and all claims related to it. As a result of negotiations, two States for two peoples, Israel and Palestine, will live side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition of each other's legitimate rights, including the right to self-determination. Each State will ensure equal civil rights for all its citizens and will be committed to respect for human rights and human dignity.

That, in our view, is in essence the vision of a two-State solution endorsed by the international community and accepted in the Arab Peace Initiative as the basis for ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieving regional peace. None of the steps to realize that vision are easy, but we cannot afford another year without courageous action undertaken for the purpose of achieving a two-State solution.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Malki (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the State of Palestine, I congratulate you, Mr. President, and your friendly country, Pakistan, on your effective presidency and wise stewardship of the Security Council this month. We also express our deep appreciation to the fraternal Kingdom of Morocco for its skilled leadership of the Council in December.

I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing today and for his tireless efforts on the ground.

I also wish to extend Palestine's warm congratulations to the new Security Council members, the friendly countries of Argentina, Australia, Luxembourg, the Republic of Korea and Rwanda. We are confident of their commitment to upholding the Charter, international law and the Council's resolutions, without exception, and we wish them every success in fulfilling their great responsibilities. I also convey Palestine's deep appreciation to the members whose terms ended in December 2012 — the friendly countries of Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa. We are grateful for the tireless efforts they exerted during their tenure in support of the rights of the Palestinian people and in aiming to reach a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I am honoured to address the Security Council today for the first time on behalf of the State of Palestine following the historic decision by the General Assembly to accord Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations with its adoption of resolution 67/19, on 29 November 2012. The overwhelming support of Member States for that initiative is a reflection of the strong support for the inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to a life of freedom and dignity in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That support clearly represents long-overdue recognition by the Assembly of Palestine's statehood. A new era has begun, and we hope it will mark a turning point for making peace and security a reality between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, and in the region as a whole.

We are grateful for the principled support demonstrated in that courageous decision taken by Member States at this juncture in history. It is high time that the State of Palestine take its rightful place among the community of nations. Our hope is renewed by that important step, which should pave the way for the acceptance of our September 2011 application for full membership in the United Nations. Moreover, we are encouraged by the signs that that momentous step will reinvigorate the international community's long-standing, yet unfulfilled, commitment to achieving a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In that regard, it is clear that support for that resolution constituted an unequivocal reaffirmation of the international community's commitment to the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, from resolution 181 (II), of 1947, to resolution 242 (1967) and all other relevant resolutions thereafter, as well as the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map. The urgency of that reaffirmation cannot be understated in the light of the two-State solution's severe denigration over the years and the collective consensus that the window of opportunity for justly and physically achieving that solution is rapidly closing. No one in the Chamber today can deny that.

The Assembly's adoption of resolution 67/19 must therefore be viewed as a legitimate, multilateral, peaceful and political effort to save the two-State solution, to reaffirm its basis and to create the proper environment for convening substantive negotiations between the parties — within a credible peace process based on the well-known terms of reference and according to a limited time frame — aimed at achieving an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 and at a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement that resolves all outstanding core issues, including Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners.

Despite that strong message by the international community, the period following the General Assembly's decision has regrettably witnessed Israeli actions that represent the complete antithesis of the two-State solution. The Palestinian leadership, under the stewardship of President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestine Liberation Organization — the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people — has reaffirmed its commitment to the path of peace and its immediate readiness to engage in negotiations on the basis of clear parameters. Israel, however, has persisted along the path of occupation, conflict and fear-mongering.

Rather than reciprocating with regard to the hand extended in peace, Israel has chosen to embark on a destructive escalation of its illegal agenda in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — the territory that constitutes the State of Palestine, which it has been illegitimately and forcibly occupying for over 45 years. As conveyed in a series of letters recently transmitted by the State of Palestine to the Security Council, Israel has persisted in behaving with utter contempt, deliberately breaching international law and disregarding the will of the international community.

That has been most starkly reflected in its intensification of its illegal settlement campaign and its heavy-handed, punitive measures against the Palestinian people and their leadership in the aftermath of the adoption of resolution 67/19. Those measures have included the withholding of Palestinian tax revenues, which has exacerbated the financial crisis and compromised the functioning of our national institutions and system of democratic governance. That has been accompanied by Israel's contempt for the international community, particularly the United Nations, as epitomized, inter alia, in the statement by the Israeli Ambassador in the General Assembly on 29 November (see A/67/PV.44) and the remarks by the Israeli Prime Minister on 21 December in an interview in which he defiantly insisted on Israel pursuing its illegal colonization programme and stated, "What the United Nations says doesn't interest me".

On the ground that attitude has manifested itself in the systematic escalation of Israel's illegal settlement campaign, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem. We recall that in December 2012, Israel blatantly announced its intentions to proceed with plans for the construction of more than 7,000 units in illegal settlements and the confiscation of hundreds more dunums of Palestinian land throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. At the core of that unprecedented settlement drive are plans to establish illegal settlements in sensitive areas to the east and south of occupied East Jerusalem, namely, the so-called E-1 area east of the city and a hill area between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, both of which are integral to the continuity and viability of the State of Palestine, as well as the settlement activities in the Al-Khalil area and the Jordan Valley. That provocative Israeli approach is also manifested in continuing terror and violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and property, under the protection and with the support of the Israeli Government.

We reiterate once again before this Council that it is abundantly clear under international law that all Israeli settlement activities are illegal. Regardless of whether it is one settlement unit or thousands, a settlement or an outpost — whatever the pretext, they are all illegal. Countless resolutions have affirmed that, as has the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of July 2004. Moreover, Israeli settlement activities constitute grave breaches of the

Fourth Geneva Convention, including war crimes, as further determined pursuant to Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Israel's illegal settlement campaign also constitutes the main obstacle to the attainment of a peace based on the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. A halt to settlement construction is not a precondition. It is a legal obligation. It requires the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and to act in such a way as to bring about a long-overdue solution to the conflict. We are at a pivotal moment. We should send a clear message to Israel to the effect that all such practices and policies are illegal and must be stopped. Otherwise, Israel will be held accountable for its violations and destruction of the two-State solution.

It is a fact that Israel has never been held accountable for its crimes. That has fostered its sense of impunity and encouraged its rejection of the path of peace. In that connection, it must be recalled that Israel's hostile and punitive behaviour following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19 was, in fact, preceded by yet another Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip, in November 2012, and repeated declarations by Israeli officials about their preferred path, that is, the path of war. Once again, a barrage of death, trauma and terror was inflicted on the Palestinian people by Israel forces, causing the death and injury of hundreds of Palestinians, including many women and children, and the destruction of homes and infrastructure through the indiscriminate Israeli bombing of densely populated civilian areas, including refugee camps.

That aggression, in addition to the Israeli blockade since 2007, has led to an escalation of the human suffering in Gaza in collective punishment of the population. Regrettably, other than issuing a press statement on 21 November 2012 (SC/10829) after the conclusion of the ceasefire agreement, the Security Council again failed to shoulder its responsibility to put an end to that Israeli aggression and to protect the Palestinian civilian population, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Nevertheless, at that time the Palestinian leadership reaffirmed, as it does now, its rejection of the path of war and its commitment to the path of peace. Public support for that position, which constitutes the core of the political policy of President Abbas and his Government, was manifested across Palestine, in particular in Gaza, at the beginning of the year in the huge rallies held on 4 January to mark the forty-eighth anniversary of the Fatah movement, in support of President Abbas and long-standing Palestinian national aspirations.

The significance of that event must be highlighted and should serve as a clear reminder to those who question the Palestinian people's support for peace and the legitimate leadership of President Abbas. In that context, reconciliation between the Palestinian political factions, in particular Fatah and Hamas, is being pursued to end the division. That is one of the demands of our people and is vital to our national goals. In that connection, we reiterate our appreciation to the Arab Republic of Egypt, the League of Arab States and all other concerned parties for their efforts. We hope that Palestinian unity will soon be achieved and that it will be respected by the international community.

Despite Israel's ongoing provocations and hostilities, which increase tensions and destabilize the situation on the ground, the developments of 29 November 2012, the ceasefire agreement in Gaza and the popular non-violent acts of the Palestinian peaceful resistance to the occupation, most recently seen in the courageous establishment of the Bab Al-Shams and Bab Al-Karamah protest villages on confiscated Palestinian land marked for Israeli colonization and in the weekly demonstrations against the settlements and the wall in villages throughout Palestine, are all abundant evidence of the Palestinian commitment to the path of peace.

However, in choosing to blindly adhere to its expansionist agenda, Israel is undermining the contiguity and unity of the land of the State of Palestine, threatening the viability of the two-State solution. We are at a crossroads. Israel must choose either to honestly engage in a meaningful political process towards achieving the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, which is a historic compromise and the relative justice to which we committed decades ago, or to force us into in an era in which that solution is abandoned. The Palestinian people would enter a new stage in their national struggle to defend and achieve their rights through all peaceful, political, diplomatic and legal means available to the State of Palestine.

The international community has a historic responsibility before it. Action must be immediately undertaken, in particular by the Security Council, to compel Israel to stop its breaches of the law and to commit to the path of peace. Negotiations cannot succeed

if they are sabotaged by an unrelenting occupation that mocks and makes it impossible to achieve peace. Moreover, the past years have proved that the parties, left to an unbalanced and unfair negotiations process, cannot achieve peace. It is also necessary to reaffirm clear parameters for the solution and for the parties to commit to them.

Business as usual cannot continue. Bold leadership, in particular by those that have staked a claim in shepherding the peace process over the years, and a significant United Nations role, including by the Security Council, are required. That leadership must be consistent with the professed values of freedom, tolerance, human dignity and justice, which are the core elements for peace and stability in our world and our region, without exception. Strong political and moral will are needed to salvage the two-State solution and to help the two parties overcome the political deadlock in order to guarantee a successful political process for the realization of a final peace agreement during the critical year of 2013.

I would like to reiterate what President Mahmoud Abbas said to day in the wake of the Israeli elections: Palestine is willing to work with any future Israeli Government, provided that it is committed to the latest General Assembly resolution regarding the recognition of the State of Palestine along the pre-1967 borders.

The Palestinian people and its leadership remain committed to the two-State solution — as is the wider Arab and Islamic world — as reflected in the continued support for the historic Arab Peace Initiative since 2002. We appeal to the international community to heed the call for peace and to conscientiously support those who yearn for freedom, with a view to ushering in an era of long-overdue justice and independence for the Palestinian people and peace and security for Palestinians and Israelis.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): As we begin a new year, I want to take the opportunity to congratulate the five new members of the Security Council. I wish each and every one of them a lot of luck and success in navigating the sometimes stormy waters of the Chamber.

Yesterday the people of Israel went to the polls. Millions of men and women cast their ballots. Israeli democracy continues to flourish. Elections are just one component of Israel's vibrant democracy. Our Government guarantees the protection of minorities, women and gays. Our courts ensure that everyone is accountable under the law. Our education system teaches tolerance and peace, not violence and hate.

We long for the day when the scenes of real elections built on the foundations of real democracy will spread to all corners of a safe, stable and secure Middle East. Such a day would mark a great turning point in the history of our region. My question to the Chamber is: How long must we wait? Today we see a far bleaker picture in much of the Middle East. Repression, instability and horrific violence continue to plague the region.

More than 60,000 have been killed in Syria in just the past two years. Al-Assad's victims include hundreds of Palestinians. Since we have heard so much about the Palestinian cause this morning, let me take this opportunity to remind the Council that Al-Assad has used fighter jets to bomb the refugee camps where Palestinians live in Syria and that Palestinians are fleeing the country by the thousands. In Lebanon more than 1 million live under the brutal oppression of Hizbullah, which has transformed the entire south of the country into an Iranian terror base.

The world's most dangerous weapons are moving within reach of our region's most dangerous actors. We face the frightening possibility that Al-Assad's vast stockpiles of chemical weapons could fall into the hands of Hizbullah or Al-Qaida. The Ayatollah regime in Iran threatens to combine its extremist ideology and advanced missile technology with nuclear weapons. The lives of millions hang in the balance.

Those are just a few of the great challenges that hang over the Middle East. Once again, none of them were prioritized for discussion this morning. Instead, the Security Council continues to use the monthly Middle East debate to single out, scrutinize and criticize Israel — an island of democracy in the world's greatest hotbed of tyranny.

I have a novel idea. Perhaps this discussion could occasionally spend some time examining why the situation in the Middle East remains unstable, undemocratic and violent. I will give the Council a hint: it has nothing to do with Israel.

There are many threats to security in our region. But the presence of Jewish homes in Jerusalem — the eternal capital of the Jewish people — has never been one of them. Jews have been building homes in Jerusalem

since the time of King David, 3,000 years ago. Jewish communities witnessed the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. They lived in Jerusalem throughout crusades and pogroms. Some here say that the preliminary building plans announced last month prevent a two-State solution, even though it is clear that all of those neighbourhoods will remain part of Israel in any final peace agreement.

I cannot understand how people can conclude that a Palestinian State cannot exist if there is contiguity between Ma'ale Adumim and Jerusalem, which are seven kilometres apart. Those who make that claim are the same people who stand up and speak about a contiguous State between Gaza and the West Bank — areas divided by more than 70 kilometres. Connecting Gaza and the West Bank would cut Israel into two. Yet, Israeli contiguity never seems to be a concern for some in the Chamber.

The briefing that we heard this morning was particularly selective in the facts it chose to present. For instance, it does not take a Sherlock Holmes or New York City Police Department detective to see that the fingerprints of senior Palestinian Authority officials were all over the recent provocations staged in the area known as E-1. Conveniently, the involvement of those Palestinian leaders in those activities was omitted, miraculously, from the briefing of this morning. Since selective perception is one of the greatest hallmarks of this debate, I would like to take a moment to set straight a few facts about the past two months.

In November 2012, President Abbas stood in the General Assembly Hall and submitted a unilateral resolution to that body (General Assembly resolution 67/19). He claimed it was an act of peace. He insisted that it was "the last chance to save the two-State solution" (*A/67/PV.44, p. 3*). The Palestinian delegation promised that they would immediately return to the negotiating table after the voting, without preconditions. I know that some in the Chamber voted for resolution 67/19 on that basis. Today, those nations who supported Abbas' bid have a duty to ask themselves: What, exactly, did we vote for?

Suffice it to say that the Palestinians have not lifted one finger to restart negotiations. We have seen neither a single gesture, nor a single statement, nor a single indication that they want to return to negotiations. Just 10 days after President Abbas spoke to the entire world about his commitment to a two-State solution, his political party — Fatah — released a new logo that completely erased the State of Israel from the map. Make no mistake, the major obstacle to a two-State solution is the Palestinian refusal to speak to their own people about the true parametres of a two-State solution — to speak a lexicon of peace, not a litany of war.

One will never hear President Abbas or any other Palestinian leader use the phrase "two States for two peoples." One will not hear them say it because they have called for an independent Palestinian State but want millions of their people to flood the Jewish State. That would mean the destruction of Israel. Let me be clear: that is not a solution for peace, and no one who truly believes in peace could ever accept it.

Some in the Chamber may say that the Palestinians know that they will have to give up the claim of return at the negotiating table. Some Palestinian leaders might even whisper it quietly behind closed doors. But they have never, ever, said it publicly. The Palestinian people have no idea that they will one day have to give up that claim of return. Since the Palestinian leadership refuses to tell the Palestinian people the truth, the international community has the responsibility to tell them the truth. Those truly interested in peace will begin by speaking out forcefully and publicly and unequivocally against that claim. We cannot abide by the voices of the selectively principled.

Last December, a few days after President Abbas appeared at the United Nations, we heard a very public statement from Khaled Mashaal, the political chief of Hamas. At a rally for hundreds of thousands in Gaza, he called for Israel's complete and total destruction. He said, "Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north; there will be no concession on one inch of land".

One would think that the call for Israel's destruction might merit a joint statement of concern from some prominent and some permanent members of the Council. I was told that some of the prominent and permanent members said something about that casual call for Israel's destruction. Israel is known for having amazing listening devices. The members must have whispered something so quietly that even our most sensitive equipment was not able to pick it up.

Apparently, Mashaal's speech was not only of concern to President Abbas. Instead of seeking peace with Israel through negotiations, he has devoted all his energy to seeking unity with Hamas. Hamas is the same terrorist organization that fired thousands of rockets

into the heart of Israeli cities last November. It is the same terrorist organization that commits a double war crime as a matter of policy, using Palestinian schools to fire rockets at Israeli schools. The Hamas charter calls for the destruction of Israel and the genocide of Jews. It has turned Gaza into a destination of choice; I would say a Club Med for global Jihadists.

Some in the Chamber have the audacity to suggest that Israel should also welcome Hamas with open arms. I ask, would they say the same if Islamic militants were firing rockets into their backyards? Would they say the same to France, which is now working with the Government of Mali to fight Al-Qaida in the Sahel? France's Foreign Minister said this month that his country was fighting to prevent the creation of an Islamist terrorist enclave "at the doorstep of France and Europe". If Mali is on France's doorstep, Gaza is in Israel's living room. Let me be perfectly clear. France's principled stand should be commended. We only ask that France and all the countries that are supporting its principled stand today support Israel tomorrow when we fight Islamic terrorism on our borders.

The Palestinian representative speaks in the Chamber as if he represents a Jeffersonian democracy. Yet, no amount of rhetoric, spin or bluster can change one simple fact: the Palestinians clearly fail to meet the most basic criteria for statehood. The only Palestinian State in the Chamber is the Palestinian state of denial. Last month's resolution did not confer Palestinian statehood. It did not constitute recognition of a Palestinian State. Many Member States made that clear on 29 November and in the days that followed. Israel has placed its view on record in connection with the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19. That position remains unchanged. The recent resolution does not entitle the Palestinians to participate in United Nations meetings and international conferences, join treaties or seek membership in international organizations as a State. The change in terminology and titles risks creating a false impression of Palestinian statehood, when no such State exists. That is clearly not mandated by resolution 67/19. In the real world statehood comes with control of territory. Yet, the resolution did not change the fact that the Palestinian Authority has no control over Gaza. That is 40 per cent of the territory that President Abbas claims to represent.

Any efforts to alter the Palestinian status outside the agreed negotiating framework directly violate the agreements between the parties. Those agreements include specific limitations on the Palestinian capacity in the sphere of foreign relations. They contain express obligations to resolve all outstanding issues through negotiations, and to refrain from any step that seeks to alter the legal status of the West Bank and Gaza pending the outcome of negotiations. Acting to facilitate violations of those agreements undermines the credibility of the Organization, which has repeatedly affirmed that a Palestinian State can only emerge as a result of bilateral negotiations.

Moreover, resolution 67/19 cannot serve as acceptable terms of reference for future negotiations. The resolution not only contradicts agreed terms of reference, it also seeks to predetermine some issues explicitly reserved for negotiation, while ignoring others such as security and the end of claims, which are core components of any future agreement. The campaign that the Palestinian leadership has waged at the United Nations is a false idol for the Palestinian people. There is only one route to statehood. It does not travel through this Chamber in New York. It runs through direct negotiations between Jerusalem and Ramallah. There are no shortcuts, no quick fixes, no instant solutions. Peace must be negotiated; it cannot be imposed.

Exactly 67 years ago this week, on 17 January 1946, the Security Council held its first meeting at Westminster in London. On that day, the Council clearly defined its mission, namely, to advance global peace and security, to oppose tyranny and to safeguard the rights of all people. It would be a true understatement to say that the monthly debate on the Middle East falls far short of that standard. Most of the millions in our regions who live under oppression, fear and violence are completely ignored in the debate. They are cast aside to make way for a litany of half-truths, myths and outright lies about Israel. Repeating a lie does not make it true. Repeating a constant flood of falsehoods does not and cannot change the facts. The simple fact remains that Israel is not what is wrong in the Middle East. Israel is what is right in the Middle East. Make no mistake: cynical politics do no favours for the Arab world. The silence of the Council in the face of terror does no favours for those seeking a brighter future. It is time to do some soul-searching in the Chamber. The Council needs a Global Positioning System to find its moral centre in the debate on the Middle East. Just weeks after the Council's founding, Sir Winston Churchill outlined the challenges facing us today. He said the following about the newly formed United

Nations: "We must make sure that its work is fruitful, that it is a reality and not a sham, ... that it is a true temple of peace...and not merely a cockpit in a Tower of Babel".

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing.

The terrorist attacks in the desert of Algeria, the threat posed by Iran and its nuclear programme and the internal challenges with which Arab societies today are grappling to make their Governments more democratic and more responsive to the needs of their people, all make the Middle East a region that must command our enduring attention and active engagement. Today I will focus on the Palestinian question and the Syrian crisis.

The current financial crisis in the Palestinian territories is severe, and the recent news of Saudi Arabia's generous $100 million donation to the Palestinian Authority is welcome. We have made enormous investments in the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people that we wish to be sustained, including through the immediate resumption of regular-clearance revenue transfers. Over the years, no Government has invested more in assistance to the Palestinians than the United States. We remain committed to supporting the Palestinian people.

Yet, as we all know, the vote on 29 November 2012 in the General Assembly (resolution 67/19) has not brought the Palestinians any closer to our common goal of achieving a State. As we have said repeatedly, the only way to establish a real Palestinian State is through the painstaking work of direct negotiations on final status issues, without preconditions, between the Israelis and Palestinians. General Assembly resolution 67/19 cannot be viewed as establishing terms of reference or as prejudging any final status issues, notably with respect to territory. These are simply inescapable facts.

The United States therefoer remains fully committed to direct negotiations, and we will continue to work vigorously towards that end. We are consulting with the parties and international partners on the way forward, and we are underscoring that every step taken must aim to reduce tensions and create a climate for peace. The Quartet envoys met earlier this month in Jordan to discuss the measures necessary to create a positive atmosphere conducive to future negotiations. That meeting followed United States Special Envoy David Hale's engagement with Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Egyptian and Arab League leaders to advance Middle East peace and security, including by maintaining and strengthening the Gaza ceasefire.

Throughout our engagement, we have reiterated our long-standing opposition to Israel's West Bank settlement activity and to construction in East Jerusalem, which run counter to the cause of peace. Construction in the E-1 area would be especially damaging to efforts to achieve a two-State solution, and we have urged Israeli leaders to reconsider those unilateral decisions and to exercise restraint. For decades, the United States has not accepted the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity, and we oppose any efforts to legalize outposts. We will continue to urge leaders on both sides to avoid unilateral steps and provocations that make peace negotiations harder to resume.

The position of the United States regarding Palestinian status, including as reflected in our explanation of vote in connection with the adoption of Assembly resolution 67/19 (A/67/PV.44, page 13), remains unchanged. The United States does not consider that the resolution bestows Palestinian statehood or recognition. Only direct negotiations to settle final status issues will lead to that outcome. In our view, therefore, any references to the State of Palestine in the United Nations, including the use of the term "State of Palestine" on the placard in the Security Council, or the use of the term "State of Palestine" in the invitation to this meeting or in other arrangements for participation in this meeting, do not reflect our acquiescence to the view that Palestine is a State. That statement of our position shall apply to Palestinian participation in meetings of the Security Council or other United Nations meetings, regardless of whether the United States specifically intervenes on this matter in the future.

Let me now turn to Syria, where the situation is dire and deteriorating. We have seen a sharp increase in indiscriminate attacks in the past month. In a small village outside Homs, regime militia reportedly killed more than 100 people last week, including entire families and numerous children. The regime's air strikes near the University of Aleppo killed 87, and attacks on health clinics and hospitals across the country have made it impossible for wounded civilians to seek help. In the face of those mounting atrocities, we reiterate our utter condemnation of any attack directed against unarmed

civilians. At all levels, those responsible for atrocities, no matter what their allegiance, will be identified and held accountable.

As the transition proceeds, we stand ready to assist Syria's new leaders in their efforts to address issues of accountability and reconciliation. For that purpose, the United States will continue to support Syrian and international efforts to document evidence of atrocities committed by all sides, for use in future accountability processes. The international community should also play a role in ensuring that any future domestic accountability processes have the expertise they need to meet international standards.

On the political and diplomatic front, I underscore my Government's strong support and gratitude for Joint Special Representative Brahimi's efforts to find a durable solution to this crisis. Every member of the Council knows that a political transition would be the fastest and most effective way to end the horrific bloodshed. The United States will therefore continue to engage with our partners, both on and off the Council, to support a meaningful political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. In that regard, I reaffirm our commitment to the principles outlined in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), including a transitional body with full executive powers formed on the basis of mutual consent.

At the same time, we are continuing our efforts to support the Syrian opposition coalition as it works towards a more unified opposition that is able to start addressing the needs of the Syrian people now. We are supporting the coalition's assistance coordination unit, so that increased assistance gets to local councils providing basic services. In addition to more than $210 million in humanitarian assistance, the United States has contributed more than $50 million to bolster Syrian civil society, including its emerging leaders, in order to help them communicate, organize and prepare for an eventual political transition.

The burden is on all of us to help the millions of people displaced and in urgent need of lifesaving assistance. There is no doubt that the tireless work of many United Nations agencies in delivering such aid, including the support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, has saved countless lives. We look forward to the United Nations pledging conference in Kuwait on 30 January and encourage States to increase their contributions to the two combined United Nations appeals. We also encourage United Nations agencies and donors to seek more opportunities for cross-border assistance, to help Syrians in underserved areas and to work with the Syrian opposition coalition's assistance coordination unit to respond to needs on the ground.

We will continue to help Syria's neighbours, including Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, to respond to the influx of refugees. We appreciate their generosity in affording shelter and services to nearly 630,000 refugees — a number sure to rise as long as Al-Assad's forces continue their assault. We commend the Lebanese Government's recent approval of a refugee response plan and encourage all neighbouring Governments to maintain open borders to those fleeing Al-Assad's brutality.

Difficult days lie ahead, especially as long as Al-Assad remains in power. We continue to support all Syrians, within and outside the Government, who aim to bring an end to the bloody Al-Assad regime and build a democratic and unified Syria in which the rule of law is respected. We will continue to seek the valuable contributions of the international community to that end.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Serry, for his detailed assessment of the situation in the Middle East. We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Malki, who is taking the floor for the first time in this Chamber in his new capacity as observer of the observer State to the United Nations.

We carefully listened to the statement by the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Prosor. I will be frank — we do not understand everything that Mr. Prosor said to the Security Council today, but we recognize that, at this stage, the Security Council, for well-known reasons, has not been able to reach a unified position allowing for true progress in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement.

The solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has long been at a deadlock. The attempts made in 2012 to establish contacts for negotiation between the Palestinians and Israelis, with the assistance of the Middle East Quartet and other interested in parties, were unsuccessful. In spite of the ongoing calm in the Gaza Strip after the November clashes, the military and political situation on the whole remains far from stable. The situation is exacerbated by continuing Israeli

settlement activities. There has been an unprecedented surge in those activities, and that is a matter of concern. According to Israeli non-governmental organizations, in 2012 alone the building of 7,000 housing units was approved, while one year earlier that number was 1,770 and, in 2010, 570 units were approved.

The recent events surrounding the so-called E-1 area demonstrate that unfortunately, in spite of the strong appeals of the international community, the Israeli authorities do not intend to review their settlement policy. This distances us even farther from the prospects of a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; it represents an outright violation of the Security Council resolutions and the road map and undermines the possibilities of a settlement on the basis of two States.

An already difficult situation is exacerbated by heavy-handed financial pressure on Palestinian authorities, from whom Israel has withheld tax and tariff revenue. This exacerbates complex social, economic and humanitarian problems in the Palestinian territories. Additional steps are needed to clear the way for a full economic exchange between the Gaza Strip and the outside world. We are convinced that the longer the current alarming status quo continues, the worse its effect will be on the process of resuming the negotiations.

The path to breaking through the stalemate and easing the tensions in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is well known. There is a need to cease unilateral actions and to rebuild trust between the parties in the interest of resuming dialogue on the agreed bases, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Going forward, this would allow for a discussion of the pressing final status issues, including borders, Jerusalem, refugees and water.

Along those lines, we welcome the critically important and timely appeal — made in December 2012 at the summit of the Ministerial Committee of the League of Arab States on the Arab Peace Initiative — for a resumption of the negotiating process on the basis of well-known international legal provisions. The final goal of such dialogue would be an end to the Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent, viable and territorially integral Palestinian State, living in peace and security with Israel. We hope that the new Israeli Government, as soon it is established, will duly take into account the need to move beyond mistrust and to re-engage in a substantive negotiations process.

A crucial factor for implementing any agreement with Israel is the establishment of inter-Palestinian reconciliation. We hope for practical results as an outcome of the agreements achieved between the leaders of Fatah and Hamas in Cairo last week.

For its part, Russia, bilaterally and in international forums, including first and foremost the Quartet of international mediators, continues to assist in overcoming the stalemate in the Palestinian-Israeli situation by relaunching the negotiating process to achieve lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis. In that context, we call, among other things, for a speedy convening of the ministerial meeting of the Quartet and more active participation by the League of Arab States in its work.

The recent exacerbation of the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria, in particular in the Yarmouk camp outside Damascus, was a striking reminder of the harmful deadlock in the Middle Eastern situation. Clashes between pro-Government and opposition forces led to the movement of many Palestinian refugees to Lebanon, further destabilizing an already difficult situation in that country. In that respect, we note the affirmed Palestinian position of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Arab States, including in the Syrian conflict.

With respect to the situation in Syria as a whole, Russia advocates a continuation of collective efforts to find a solution to the conflict in that country on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group (S/2012/523, annex). In that context, we are providing necessary support to the activities of Joint Special Representative Brahimi. We feel that a solution to the crisis must be political and attained through Syrian-led dialogue on the basis of the principles of international law. In that connection, all parties to the conflict must cease all violence and be guided solely by the greater interests of the Syrian people and the task of ensuring their security and the democratic and free development of the country.

While the international community bears significant responsibility for resolving the Syrian crisis, in the final analysis it must be a Syrian-led process. In that connection, we regret that the Syrian opposition has not taken steps to engage in dialogue. We are convinced

that the time has come for such a step, in particular as the Syrian Government has conveyed a willingness to negotiate with a broad section of the opposition forces.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

In these early weeks of 2013, the Middle East is undermined by two crises that, after another year of blockade and paralysis, call for resolute action on the part of the international community.

First, with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Secretary-General has continuously warned us over the course of the past year that the window of opportunity for a two-State solution is closing. The options now are simple. Either 2013 will be a year in which substantive negotiations are undertaken, leading to a final agreement settling all issues and demands, or it will see the disappearance of this unique opportunity to establish peace via a viable, independent, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State, living in peace and security within recognized borders alongside the Israeli State, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the two States.

Indeed, the reality on the ground cannot be denied, given the latest announcements of the Israeli Government on settlement activity, in particular in the E-1 area, that if completed would separate Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank — that is, from the State of which the eastern part of the city should be the capital. We condemn that settlement policy, which is illegal and a serious obstacle to peace.

In that context, the withholding by Israel of taxes and tariffs collected on behalf the Palestinian Authority is a counterproductive retaliation measure that we have called upon Israel not to take after the General Assembly's sovereign vote. It must stop. It exacerbates a financial crisis in the Palestinian Authority that undermines the succesful institutional reforms achieved. Donors must mobilize to address this problem. The European Union will soon allocate a large part of its annual contribution to the Palestinian budget, and France will also endeavour to make a first payment of its budgetary assistance as quickly as possible.

However, it is time to stop talking about the two-State solution; we must work to realize it in 2013. We know how many efforts have been made since the Oslo Accords, first and foremost by the United States. We recognize also the courage needed by the leaders in both Israel and Palestine. But in order for their future efforts to bear fruit, it is essential to define a framework likely to relaunch substantive discussions on all final status issues in an adequate climate of trust and within a realistic timeline. With our European partners, we have already proposed parameters for defining that framework. We call on all key stakeholders in such a process — the new American Administration as well as regional partners — to make a new commitment on the basis of those principles, with the active support of the international community as a whole. A new approach is needed, with the active support of the United States, the Europeans and the Arabs. France will give unstinting support to those efforts, including within the Security Council and the European Union.

However, no process will materialize without the will of the parties to restart substantive negotiations immediately and without preconditions. That implies, on the Palestinian side, that they make constructive use of the status resulting from resolution 67/19, adopted on 29 November by the General Assembly, and, on the Israeli side, that the next Government concretely show its peaceful intentions so that the trust shaken, particularly by the unilateral measures, may be re-established.

To reach a final settlement, inter-Palestinian reconciliation under the auspices of President Abbas, in conformity with the principles of the Palestine Liberation Organization, is necessary. We welcome the Egyptian efforts to that end. It is important to support partners for peace and not to offer a platform for Hamas radicals, whose declaration with respect to Israel we condemn, as we have always done, in French and Hebrew, on the site of our embassy in Tel Aviv.

We are pleased that the ceasefire in Gaza is holding, but it needs to be strengthened. That involves combating arms trafficking and lifting the blockade against Gaza, in order to offer other political horizons for the residents of Gaza and ensure the security of Israel for the long term. France and its European partners are ready to contribute to that effort, in particular through the reactivation and strengthening of the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah.

My second subject is Syria. The year 2013 must also be the year of the liberation of the Syrian people, whose situation is tragic. Ms. Valerie Amos and Ms. Navi Pillay described for us again on Friday the

ordeal of the Syrian population — at least 60,000 dead, 600,000 refugees, and 4 million people, mostly women and children, in utter destitution. Despite the repeated condemnations of the international community, the Damascus regime continues to violate international law by using cluster bombs, incendiary bombs and now ballistic missiles against its own people. We recall that any use of chemical weapons by the regime of Bashir Al-Assad would be unacceptable and would lead to a reaction from the international community.

In that context, the Council's inability to take action is scandalous. That is why with 58 other States we have called on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We must not let the silence draw a veil across the war crimes and crimes against humanity that are being perpetrated in Syria today. We must not stop demanding that the Syrian authorities, their agents and their accomplices be brought to account before the Syrian people and the international community after Syria's liberation. That is a precondition for reconciliation in the country.

With regard to humanitarian issues, the emergency calls for a response that covers all affected Syrians, including in the liberated areas. We support the efforts of the humanitarian coordinator, Ms. Amos, as well as those of the specialized agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to expand access to populations in need. It is absolutely necessary that the Syrian authorities authorize the full range of humanitarian actors to operate in their territory, whether or not it be under their control. Confronted with the immense needs within Syria, as well as in countries of the region, where more than 600,000 Syrians have sought refuge, donors must remobilize. In that connection, we welcome the organization of the Kuwait conference by the Secretary-General.

France will also continue to work in coordination with the Syrian National Coalition and its assistance coordination unit to bring aid to vulnerable populations that do not have access to traditional assistance channels. We support the contacts that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has made with the Coalition to ensure access to zones liberated by the opposition.

But beyond the humanitarian crisis and the human rights issues, the way out of the Syrian crisis remains political. We have therefore worked for a transition in line with the aspirations of the Syrian people. We support the efforts of the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Brahimi, to reach a solution, and we welcome his resolve. Unfortunately, President Al-Assad, in his statement of 6 January — a speech he could have delivered 18 months ago, without alterations — showed once again that he had closed the door on a political transition.

Nevertheless, to encourage that possibility, France is helping the opposition to develop a structure and actively prepare for transition. The creation of the Syrian National Coalition, recognized by more than a hundred States on 12 December in Marrakech, is a major political turning point, as it shows the international community that the Coalition represents the credible political alternative we had hoped for, based on principles of inclusiveness, democracy, national unity and respect for human rights. Today, a majority of Members of the United Nations recognize and support it. We will continue to support this project, which represents the aspirations of the Syrian people. We encourage all the Members of the Organization to do the same.

A quick transition in Syria depends on regional security and stability. The displacement of populations and the socioeconomic tensions resulting from the Syrian crisis for the neighbouring countries, as well as the intensification of violence such as the regime's attempts to export the crisis, are destabilizing factors. We once again remind the Syrian regime of its obligations with regard to respect for the territorial integrity of neighbouring States, primarily its obligations with regard to Lebanon and Turkey. Similarly, in the Golan, the violation of the area of limitation must stop.

Faced with the these risks of destabilization, France is offering its support to the countries that are generously taking in refugees. We also recall our solidarity with Turkey and the Council's commitment to the end of impunity in Lebanon respect for its integrity and sovereignty. France continues to offer its support to the efforts of the Lebanese authorities to preserve the unity and stability of the country. and it encourages all Lebanese political stakeholders to constructively take part in the consultations led by President Sleiman to that end.

The international community must remobilize to find without delay a way to settle the two crises. If the year 2013 does not see the achievement of a two-State solution, the West Bank and Gaza will be swept up in the regional turmoil and radicalization. All the efforts

made since Oslo would be reduced to nothing. If 2013 does not see the transition in Syria, we will have to bear responsibility for the destabilization of the entire region.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we want to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We also thank Mr. Riad Malki and the representative of Israel for their briefings.

Some question the frequency with which we address this issue in the Security Council. If that frequency were a function of progress made, perhaps our meetings would not be justified, since the few advances that have been made have been generally modest, and certainly not linear in nature. But if the frequency is tabulated as a function of the magnitude and intensity of changes, then our meetings are fully justified. A region that for forty years valued continuity over change has seen a frenzy of events since 2011 that point towards change, and even profound change. As with any transition, the consequences and outcomes of such change cannot be predicted, but at least they should be carefully monitored.

Today, I will not address the bigger picture, but will focus instead on two topical issues: the situation in Syria and the peace process in the Middle East.

With regard to the situation in Syria, the work of the Council throughout most of the past year was focused on the search for a political solution to the conflict that has gripped that country. Despite the efforts, first by Kofi Annan and then by Lakhdar Brahimi, throughout all those months we witnessed an increase in the use of violence by both the Government and the armed opposition, leading to the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, the suffering of millions of people and a humanitarian crisis of grave proportions.

Guatemala continues to believe strongly that the only solution to the conflict in Syria is rooted in a commitment by both parties to lay down their arms and negotiate a political exit. We understand that the logic of war, which seems to prevail with both parties — the Government and the armed opposition — prevents an easy solution. But it is clear that the prolongation of the armed struggle will only serve to increase sectarian hatred among the people, with the additional risk of spreading to neighbouring countries. In that context, the involvement of the international community will be essential.

Any transition agreement in Syria must be the product of an inclusive process led by the Syrian people in which the rights of all are respected. We believe that any transitional Government must have the support of all the Syrian people and must be the product of a democratic electoral process. Here it should be made clear, however, that those responsible for all crimes committed in Syria, whoever they are, must be punished for their actions. Atrocities of the magnitude of those that have occurred in Syria cannot be allowed to go unpunished.

Let me turn now to the Middle East peace process, including the Palestinian question. In 2013, 20 years will have passed since the signing of the Oslo Accords. It is very sad to recognize that we are no closer today to the solution of two sovereign States, living in peace within secure borders, than we were back in 1993. But the frustration built up over those 20 years by the lack of progress and by the deterioration linked to the proclivity of each party to blame the other for the lack of progress makes it today more urgent than ever to give that vision a chance finally to become reality.

At least for our part, we have not given up hope. When we consider the options for addressing what in our jargon is known as "the Palestinian question", the option of two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace and harmony within secure borders must not to be seen as an unattainable dream, but rather as the best and most viable option within reach. To achieve it, it is of course the parties directly involved who must show the political will and commitment to negotiate the content and scope of a final agreement. Direct negotiations between the parties is without doubt the only way to reach lasting agreements.

Until such negotiations occur, the international community must urge both sides to avoid any act, action or provocation that may hinder the possibility of a return to the negotiating table. This includes, of course, preventing the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, but also freezing the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territory, as such settlements are illegal under international law. It is alarming that the Israeli Government continues to promote the construction of new settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in such sensitive areas as that known as E-1. The decision of the Israeli Government to withhold funds from tax revenues intended for the Palestinian Authority that

are intended to pay civil servants' salaries falls into the same category.

In other words, all the acts that on a daily basis threaten to crush the possibility of a lasting solution are unjustified and undermine any hope that these peoples may enjoy a life of peace and security. It is unjustifiable that the decisions of Governments and armed groups perpetuate hatred and separation between peoples who so desperately need to live together.

For all these reasons, we affirm that the international community, through the United Nations, has the obligation to condemn any and all violations, including with respect to security, and to take all actions necessary to put an end to such transgressions. The parties cannot be expected to act responsibly when others deliberately avoid condemning their actions.

Finally, my delegation believes that only by respecting the rights of each of these peoples and with a firm commitment to seek a peaceful solution will both be able to live together within strong and secure borders.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I should like to thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing and Palestinian Foreign Minister Mr. Malki and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their contributions to today's debate.

The events of the final two months of 2012 highlight the urgency with which we must all approach the Middle East peace process. Negotiations towards a two-State solution are the only way to ensure that the Israeli people have the security they are entitled to and that the Palestinian people have the State they deserve. The year 2013 is a critical year. The window is rapidly closing on the two-State solution. Without a concerted, urgent effort towards negotiations in 2013, we could find ourselves in a situation where there is no longer a two-State solution to speak of. There is a real risk that facts on the ground, in particular Israeli settlement activity, will mean that a viable Palestinian State is no longer possible. Without this, there will be no security for Israel. Furthermore, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains critical to the longer-term stability of the Middle East region.

The parties themselves are, of course, central to achieving a credible return to negotiations. We call upon both President Abbas and the next Israeli Prime Minister to demonstrate the bold, decisive leadership required to push the process forward. But the history and politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict show that serious external leadership is also required to reinvigorate a return to negotiations. We look in particular to the United States to show that leadership and to drive the peace process forward.

The United Kingdom, with our European partners, stands ready to offer significant political and practical support. Together the international community has to make greater efforts in 2013 than anything seen since the Oslo peace accords 20 years ago.

The countries of the region have a vital role to play by setting out the positives that will flow from the resolution of the conflict, including greater long-term security for the Middle East region. We encourage the countries in the region to think about how they can make a positive contribution to help create a conducive environment for a return to negotiations.

If there is to be genuine progress in 2013, both sides must avoid steps that would risk setting the peace process back. For the Palestinian Authority, that means returning to negotiations without preconditions and avoiding steps that deepen the lack of trust. For the Government of Israel, that means being prepared to enter serious negotiations and ceasing settlement activity, which is illegal under international law.

On 17 December, following the announcement of more than 4,000 new settlement units, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Portugal delivered a statement in which we expressed our strong opposition to the plans by Israel to expand settlement construction in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and in particular plans to develop the E-1 area. Since then, we have seen yet more settlement activity, including the decision on 7 January to approve zoning boundaries which effectively designate the illegal outpost of Nofei Nehemia, in the north of the West Bank, as a settlement under Israeli law.

Tenders have been published for 198 settlement units in the Hebron area which, if built, would further jeopardize the territorial contiguity of any future Palestinian State. The United Kingdom condemns such actions, which are profoundly provocative and run contrary to the Geneva Conventions. Such steps are damaging to Israel's international reputation as well as to the peace process.

It is also vital that the Government of Israel reinstate the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, in line with its obligations under the Paris

Protocol. We understand that $120 million per month is being withheld, which would normally account for 44 per cent of total Palestinian Authority spending.

The dire financial situation of the Palestinian Authority should be of concern to us all. It is in all of our interests to ensure that the Palestinian Authority is sustained. The United Kingdom is a principal supporter of the Palestinian Authority and will continue its strong support for its State-building work. We urge our international partners to do all they can in support, and we welcome the decision by the European Union to front-load its budget support to the Palestinian Authority by advancing €20 million this month.

The United Kingdom welcomes the work of those involved in the Gaza ceasefire negotiations and remains ready to support the parties in implementation. It is important now to work towards the easing of restrictions on Gaza, the end of arms smuggling and Palestinian reconciliation so as to increase the chances of achieving long-term peace.

We continue to follow developments linked to Palestinian reconciliation closely. A reconciled Palestinian polity is ultimately necessary for peace. We have made it consistently clear that we will engage with any Palestinian Government that shows, through both its words and its actions, that it is committed to the principles set out by President Abbas in Cairo in May 2011.

In Syria, the violence continues at a horrific rate, with the regime bearing the brunt of the responsibility through its use of air strikes, ballistic missiles and heavy weapons. Despite regime attempts to blame the opposition, it is now evident that the recent explosions at Aleppo University, which killed more than 80 people, were caused by missiles fired from regime jets. Terrible acts have been committed across Syria, and that is why we are supporting the call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

The Syrian opposition is increasingly credible and organized. It draws on the powerful yearning of the Syrian people for the freedom they have been denied for decades. The opposition has not only withstood the most brutal levels of repression imaginable, it has strengthened and consolidated its position as the Syrian people turn away from a discredited and disgraced regime.

The regime needs to understand that the Syrian people will not be slaughtered into submission. It cannot crush the opposition by force. The regime must recognize the need to take the political route, which starts with meeting its obligations to bring about a sustained cessation of hostilities, as the Council has repeatedly demanded. We strongly support the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in his efforts to achieve that goal.

We want to see a peaceful political transition backed by the international community and the Council. But we must be realistic. No opposition movement that wants to play a role in Syria's future is going to be prepared to work with Al-Assad. One can make a strong moral argument for Al-Assad's departure, but there is an equally strong practical reality. Any transition that involves him is simply not sustainable. There needs to be a clear break from the leader who has unleashed this carnage on his own people.

We want the Council to play the role that it was established to fulfil. Its failure to do so, so far is a stain on its reputation. We are ready to work with Mr. Brahimi and to resume efforts in the Council to come together behind the steps that are necessary to secure a peaceful political transition.

But we need to be clear that the transition is already under way, whether we are influencing it or not. While the Council remains blocked, we and our partners will continue to work outside the Council to help the Syrian people prepare for the transition that they want and deserve.

In the meantime, the people of Syria continue to pay a terrible price under Al-Assad's brutal regime. The Kuwait donors conference to be held at the end of this month is an opportunity for the international community to step up its support for the multilateral effort to help those in dire need.

The United Kingdom has already contributed $110 million to support the people of Syria and the region. But to date the overall contributions by the international community have been woefully inadequate. We must all be ready to increase our financial support to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process, for his very comprehensive briefing, as well as

the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their respective statements.

Luxembourg fully endorses the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

I will begin with the peace process in the Middle East, before moving on to Syria.

The situation is troubling. Recent developments in the Middle East have given rise to great uncertainty. That is evident in the continuing increase in the number of settlements, in violation of international law; the repeated withholding of the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues; and the proliferation of provocative statements made by extremists from all sides.

Luxembourg is very concerned about the decisions taken by the Israeli authorities following the granting to Palestine by the General Assembly, on 29 November last, of the status of non-member observer State. Like its partners in the European Union, Luxembourg is deeply troubled by Israeli plans to expand settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and particularly by the projects in the E-1 area. We are firmly opposed to this. Implementing those projects would seriously undermine the prospects for a negotiated settlement of the conflict by jeopardizing the chances for a viable, contiguous Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States.

Against that backdrop, tensions have increased alarmingly in the West Bank. The extremists on both sides mutually feed off their reciprocal and provocative acts. What can be said about the situation, except that such radicalization is a godsend for those seeking to prevent the dying peace process from reviving? What can be said about the statements that refuse to grant Israel the right to security, or even the right to exist, except that they are a way of preventing peace — as if after almost 65 years of conflict, against all odds, there is any kind of hope of resolving the conflict by avoiding genuine dialogue?

How do we relaunch the peace process? The basis for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East has been laid out many times. We are all familiar with the terms of that equation. The time has come to take bold and concrete measures to achieve peace. The negotiations between the parties must finally be resumed. Only negotiations will make it possible to deal with the root causes of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Whatever Government is formed after yesterday's elections in Israel, we hope that Israelis and Palestinians will act promptly and agree on the modalities for the immediate resumption of direct talks. On the basis of such an agreement, and in the context of a credible framework that is structured around clear parameters that lays out the basis for negotiations and that is itself based on a precise timetable, the negotiators can then agree on new and significant efforts to achieve peace. For such a resumption of negotiations to occur, appropriate international support will be necessary, as will decisive commitment from all key participants, including the United States.

In the Council, and as a member of the European Union, Luxembourg will do all it can to provide both parties with all the support they need to identify and accept a compromise that, when all is said and done, will necessarily be painful but necessary. The countries of the region have a crucial role to play in that respect.

We believe that an important part of the equation leading to a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will also involve reconciliation between the Palestinians, under the leadership of President Abbas. In that context, we welcome the mediation efforts undertaken by Egypt.

Allow me to add a few words on the subject of the unprecedented financial crisis that the Palestinian Authority is experiencing currently. Luxembourg appeals to Israel to promptly unblock, in keeping with the Paris Protocol, the transfer of fiscal revenues that it receives on behalf the Palestinian Authority. On a bilateral basis, Luxembourg contributes €500,000 annually to the Palestinian Authority. That contribution is in addition to the significant contributions of the European Union, to which Luxembourg, as a member of the European Union, also contributes. The European Union announced just last week the disbursement of €60 million to help the Palestinian Authority pay wages and pensions during the first quarter of 2013. We call on other donors, in particular the countries of the region, to show their solidarity. Otherwise, the viability of the Palestinian Authority and the process of establishing State infrastructure will be seriously jeopardized.

All the necessary support must also be given to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its activities in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. According to UNRWA reports, the 525,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria are among

the minorities most affected by the current conflict in Syria, with 80 per cent of them are dependent upon UNRWA for access to basic social services.

I now turn to the situation in Syria. During the Council's consultations on 18 January 2013, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Valerie Amos, described the tragic situation in Syria, where human rights are trampled and humanitarian distress has reached unbelievable levels. The figures speak for themselves. After almost two years of conflict, over 60,000 people have died in the fighting. Over 4 million people are directly affected by the crisis and need humanitarian aid, while the continued hostilities and the current winter conditions compound the situation further. Now more than ever, humanitarian access must be ensured. We hope that Ms. Amos' visit to Syria will enable progress to be made in this respect, including with regard to essential assistance from neighbouring countries.

The international community, for its part, must do all it can to alleviate the suffering of the affected populations and to provide support to the neighbouring countries of Syria — Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq — which are generously and selflessly hosting the displaced Syrian population. The extent of the crisis is such that substantial financial resources will be necessary to meet the needs identified in the United Nations humanitarian aid plan for Syria and the region. The donor conference to be held on 30 January in Kuwait City must mobilize those resources. Luxembourg has, to date, made humanitarian contributions of €2 million to assist persons impacted by the Syrian crisis and is planning on announcing a substantial additional contribution on 30 January.

It is, however, as much a political emergency as a humanitarian one. In the end, the humanitarian challenges will only be resolved through a negotiated political outcome to the crisis. Syria must undertake a political transition process that meets the aspirations of all Syrians. That is the only way to restore peace in Syria and protect the security of the region. Otherwise, the list of atrocities will, alas, continue to grow.

We reiterate our full support to Mr. Brahimi's efforts to achieve a political outcome to the conflict as soon as possible. We must give him all the necessary support to allow him to make progress along that path. We owe that to the people of Syria, who are the victims, above all, of the intransigence of the authorities who are clinging to power. Luxembourg stands shoulder to shoulder with the Syrian people in their courageous fight for freedom, dignity and democracy.

As Ms. Pillay emphasized last week, and as already stated by the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, human rights violations are increasingly prevalent in Syria. An increasing number of such actions could be qualified as war crimes or crimes against humanity. Those crimes cannot go unpunished. Those responsible for the atrocities committed in Syria must be held accountable for their acts, without distinction of any kind. This accountability applies first and foremost to the national authorities.

The international justice system has a complementary role to play in intervening where there is a refusal or inability to act at the national level. Syria clearly has not responded to the appeals of the international community in that regard. Luxembourg believes that, in the absence of a credible, fair and independent system of accountability, the International Criminal Court (ICC) must be seized of the situation. Luxembourg therefore supports the Swiss initiative to send a letter to the President of the Security Council calling on the Council to refer to the ICC the situation that has prevailed in Syria since March 2011, without exception and without distinction as regards the alleged perpetrators of those crimes (S/2013/19, annex). That request has been supported by 58 States from every region of the world. We will remain committed to ensuring that that appeal for accountability does not go unheard.

Mr. Nduhungirehe (Rwanda) (*spoke in French*): All me at the outset to thank you, Sir, for having organized this debate. I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the general situation in the region. I also welcome Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, and Ambassador Ron Prosor of Israel.

More than six decades after the creation of our Organization and the establishment of the State of Israel, the members of the Security Council are called upon once again to review their collective conscience concerning peace in the Middle East. Obviously, Rwanda is concerned over the political status quo in Israel and Palestine, and over the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank.

Like the African Union, Rwanda reiterates that only a political, two-State solution is viable for those two nations. It will require the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. In that regard, Rwanda is deeply concerned over various statements issued by the Israeli Government following the vote by the General Assembly on 29 November, according Palestinian the status of observer State to the United Nations. These statements include announcements of the construction of more than 7,000 new housing units in the West Bank, including 3,000 in the E-1 area of East Jerusalem.

Not only is this settlement policy a violation of international law, in particular the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, but it will also and above all divide the West Bank and make unviable the Palestinian State we all wish to see. Moreover, Rwanda calls on Israel to end all witholding of Palestinian tax revenues, which has already exacerbated an already critical humanitarian situation.

Nevertheless, Rwanda believes that the security of Israel and its people is critical to finding a political solution. In that respect, we condemn rocket fire and terrorist attacks on Israeli territory, as well as any disproportionate and indiscriminate response against the people of Gaza. We hope that the ceasefire achieved in Gaza thanks to the actions of Egyptian President Morsy will endure. We condemn any rhetoric from the Hamas leadership negating the very existence of Israel and calling for its destruction.

Rwanda firmly supports the Palestinian Authority, under President Abbas, and calls for the unity and reconciliation of the Palestinian people and its leaders. Rwanda supports Egypt's efforts to that end. Such reconciliation is a prerequisite for political consistency in upholding Palestinian interests. Nevertheless, any reconciliation among Palestinian leaders must go hand in hand with an unequivocal renunciation of terrorism on the part of certain Hamas leaders and their irreversible recognition of Israel's right to exist.

Our country reiterates that only direct political dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will lead to a lasting solution to the conflict. We hope that, following yesterday's elections in Israel, contact will resume between the two parties. In that regard, while strongly committed to the right of peoples to self-determination, Rwanda recalls that there is no shortcut to peace. Regrettably, history has taught that any unilateral activity can only exacerbate an already tenuous situation. On the other hand, we support the Quartet's mediation efforts, although we regret the current diplomatic stalemate. We therefore call on the Quartet and other countries that have influence on the two parties to the conflict to redouble their efforts to devise new initiatives for peace in the Middle East.

Allow me to say a few words on the conflict in Syria. Rwanda condemns the violence in that country, which has led to more than 60,000 deaths in 22 months, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We recall that the responsibility to protect in Syria is borne primarily by the Syrian Government, whose army, according to many reports, is guilty of crimes of war and crimes against humanity. We also condemn the crimes committed by the opposition, including attacks committed by terrorist groups.

As with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we believe that a resolution to the Syrian conflict requires open and direct political dialogue. As Gandhi said, strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. We therefore call on all Syrian parties to demonstrate their strength and will by engaging in political dialogue, which is the only way to end the suffering of the Syrian people. In that regard, Rwanda pays tribute to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, for his untiring efforts on behalf of peace in Syria. We also believe that any political solution must be based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and ensure that justice is served to the Syrian people. We nevertheless reiterate our belief that Syrians must be masters of their own destiny and that any foreign intervention, be it may military, political or legal, can only complicate an already difficult peace process.

In conclusion, it is clear that the status quo in the Middle East will have devastating consequences not only for the region, but also for the world as a whole. We recall that the current situation has for some time now empowered Islamic terrorism and promoted the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We therefore call on everyone to shoulder their responsibilities.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank Robert Serry for his report. We welcome the presence of Palestinian Foreign Minister Malki an Israel's Permanent Representative, Ambassador Prosor.

So often in this Council, we say that the situation between Israel and the Palestinians is at a crucial juncture, and it often is. But we now seem to be facing a decisive stage. The status quo is self-evidently unsustainable. The prospect of a two-State solution is quickly disappearing. It is time for a new effort to resuscitate the peace process, but with a genuine focus not on the process but on the objective — peace.

The conflict in Israel and Gaza in November 2012 highlighted again the fundamental risks to peace and security of allowing the status quo to continue. Australia condemned the rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza. We recognized Israel's right to defend itself. Obviously, we welcomed the ceasefire and commended Egypt's leadership role in brokering the agreement, with support from others.

But it is critical for the ceasefire's the effective implementation that efforts to prevent the flow of weapons into Gaza be intensified. And while acknowledging that Israel has already taken some steps in this regard, there is an urgent need for a further relaxation of restrictions on the flow of lawful goods into and out of Gaza so that the Gazan economy can grow. Of course, a ceasefire does not guarantee lasting peace. The only way to secure that, as we know, is for both Israel and the Palestinians to resume negotiations without preconditions towards a two-state solution.

General Assembly resolution 67/19 on the Palestinians' status as a non-member observer State reflected international support for a future Palestinian State, as well as deep concern about the continuing stalemate on the ground. Australia abstained in the voting on the resolution, reflecting both our support for a Palestinian State and our concern that the only way to achieve the reality of statehood for Palestinians is through direct negotiations. Australia urged both Israel and the Palestinians not to exploit or overreact to the vote. Instead, actions by both sides must be in the interests of peace, and neither side should create obstacles to that objective.

Australia has therefore been deeply concerned by Israel's decisions to expand settlements. Settlements are illegal under international law; they undermine the prospects for peace and directly threaten the viability of a contiguous Palestinian State, and hence a negotiated two-State solution. The recent announcements in the E-1 block were of particular concern and took us further away from the path to peace, and we continue to be deeply concerned by instances of settler violence. We also call on the Palestinian Authority to exercise restraint and to avoid provocative actions at international forums. We urge the Palestinians to resolve their internal differences, unite for peace and cease acts of violence against Israel.

At the same time, we need to reinforce the role of the Palestinian Authority, which is fundamental to stability in the region. We call on those countries in a position to do so to provide further financial support to the Authority. Australia has made a five-year commitment. It is also vital that tax transfers to the Authority be resumed.

Like all of us, Australia wants to see a secure Israel living in peace alongside a viable Palestinian State. Lasting security for Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian State cannot be achieved by unilateral actions. They can be achieved only through negotiation of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 boundaries, with agreed land swaps. Australia calls on Israel and the Palestinians to return to direct negotiations in good faith and prepared to make the compromises required by both sides to achieve a settlement. We also call on both sides to refrain from further actions that undermine confidence and damage the prospects for negotiations to resume.

The worsening conflict in Syria will soon enter its third year. The assessment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that the death toll has reached at least 60,000 should shock us. As a member of the Security Council, Australia will work to encourage a strong and unified response to bring about a process of political transition. We support the work of Joint Special Representative Brahimi, including his call for strong backing from the Council to enhance the prospects for transition. The Council needs to take a fresh look at how it can best support Mr Brahimi's efforts. Continued inaction will only condemn Syrians to further bloodshed and the region to greater instability.

President Al-Assad has had many opportunities to end the brutality against his own people. We have seen nothing that would suggest that he is willing to engage in meaningful negotiations. His speech on 6 January was not a step on the road to peace; it led down a cul-de-sac. He must step down now.

Australia joined more than 100 countries at the December Friends of Syria meeting in Marrakesh in acknowledging the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the legitimate

representative of the Syrian people. We are working with partners to ensure that the National Coalition is a responsible representative of the Syrian people. It is imperative that it abide by the norms of international humanitarian law.

As we know all too starkly, the humanitarian dimension of the conflict continues to worsen, increasing the need for international support, including through the current United Nations appeals. The meeting in Kuwait at the end of this month will be an essential opportunity to galvanize further support. Like many others, Australia is particularly concerned about securing adherence to international humanitarian law and ensuring the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel. We have advanced a humanitarian initiative for protecting medical facilities and workers in Syria, which is a major priority for us. We will continue to work with other countries to secure a commitment from all sides in the conflict not to target medical personnel, not to block access to doctors and hospitals, and not to attack medical facilities.

To conclude, as we approach the third year of the Syrian conflict, our collective efforts obviously must be directed towards an immediate end to the violence, the realization of a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of all of Syria's citizens, ensuring accountability for the crimes that are being committed and planning for post-conflict stabilization assistance to help rebuild Syria. The Council must play a decisive role in all of that.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I wish to welcome Mr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister of Palestine, to the Council and to thank Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing on the developments in the situation in the Middle East, including Palestine.

No one can disagree that the Palestinian question is in an extremely critical and historical phase right now. We have seen many years of stalemate and setbacks in the peace process in the Middle East as a result of obstacles erected by the Israeli occupation authorities and their complete lack of political will to allow the Palestinian people to establish their own independent sovereign State.

The situation has further deteriorated with Israel's intensification of settlement activity, particularly its announced intention to construct thousands of settlement units in the E-1 area, north and south of East Jerusalem and in the West Bank, in a way that would lead to the geographical bisection of the entire West Bank, effectively erasing the possibility of achieving peace. Morocco strongly condemns this Israeli settlement plan and calls on the international community, as represented in the Council, to intervene to put an end to such policies, which, if things remain unchanged in 2013, will effectively make any political solution, including the two-State solution, impossible.

While Israel persists in its settlement activities in Palestinian territory, it prevents Palestinians from building on their own land. It destroys Palestinians' homes, displaces them, and confiscates their land, as we recently saw in Bab Al-Shams and Bab Al-Karamah. East Jerusalem is the primary area targeted by the new settlement plan because of the religious significance it holds for the three religions. The policy is designed to change the demographic and geographic composition of the area and its cultural and religious features in order to isolate it from its natural Palestinian surroundings.

His Majesty the King of Morocco, as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, has called on the Security Council, and especially its influential members, to live up to their responsibility, to take a principled position opposing the desecration of Muslim and Christian religious sites, and to safeguard the people and those sites. Israel should be made to honour international resolutions that declare its actions as null and void.

Palestinians have proven by word and deed their commitment to the peace process and to negotiations to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We believe that Palestinian reconciliation will bolster the negotiating position of the Palestinian side. Arab countries have reaffirmed that a just and comprehensive peace is an irreplaceable strategic choice. However, experience has shown that the flexibility and commitment shown by the Palestinian side are not reciprocated by the Israeli side. Rather, Israel persists in its settlement activities, its blockade against Gaza and its occupation practices, thereby undermining the comprehensive final solution, which enjoys international support.

The international community must firmly and immediately intervene and reaffirm the need to work for the two-State solution within clear political parameters and a finite timeframe through negotiations between the two parties to reach a settlement, enabling the Palestinian people to establish their own viable, independent State based on the 1967 borders, with East

Jerusalem as its capital, and living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

The economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, as Mr. Serry said, continues to deteriorate owing to the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian Authority's growing budget deficit caused by Israel's withholding of tax and customs revenues in response to General Assembly resolution 67/19, which granted Palestine non-member observer status in the United Nations. This jeopardizes the Palestinian Authority's achievements to date. The Gaza Strip continues to suffer an unjust blockade that flagrantly violates international law and international humanitarian law and denies the rights and dignity of more than 1.5 million Palestinians. We call for an end to this condemned blockade, and urge the international community to stop such collective punishment.

The deterioratating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel's suffocating grip on its population increase tensions, reduce the chances for peace, and pose unprecedented threats to all peoples of the region, without exception. The situation compels the Council and the Quartet to act immediately to ensure that negotiations towards the establishment of a just and comprehensive solution in the Middle East can resume.

Our focus on the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, arises from our serious concern about the situation. However, that does not mean that we are any less concerned about Syria or Israel's occupation of other Arab territories in the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. We note with the utmost concern the worsening humanitarian conditions in Syria. I would like to express our recognition and appreciation of the initiative of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to hold a donors conference in Kuwait City by the end of the month.

We also commend the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi on behalf of the United Nations and the League of Arab States. We hope that, by the end of the month, the Council will be able to report conditions that are more conducive to ending the armed conflict and to the launching of an inclusive national dialogue aimed at the establishment a free and democratic society in Syria that guarantees the rights and dignity of all and preserves the national unity and territorial integrity of that brotherly country.

In conclusion, I cannot fail to mention Morocco's condemnation of Israel's policies towards Lebanon. We reiterate our grave concern about the stability, territorial integrity, unity and sovereignty of Lebanon, in particular given the challenges that the region currently faces. We would like to welcome the foresight, wisdom and responsibility of all Lebanese parties that have refrained from taking any action that would exacerbate the situation in the region.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel for their statements. On the occasion of this debate, my delegation will talk about the Israeli-Palestinian question and the situations in Syria and Lebanon.

As we once again meet to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, my delegation can only express its great concern about the events that continue to take place in the region. As we all know, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to keep the attention of the international community, in particular the Security Council, without achieving tangible progress.

Events with regard to conflict in recent months are perceived differently by the parties involved. We still recall the crisis between Hamas and Israel in the month of November, which led to numerous victims and massive destruction of property. The sense of responsibility that the two parties demonstrated, with the help of friendly countries, in particular Egypt, fortunately make it possible to reach an agreement that put an end to the crisis. My country would once again like to welcome that.

To preserve that peace, the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority must resolve to work towards strengthening mutual trust. While granting Palestine the status of observer State in the United Nations gave rise to the hope within the Palestinian Authority that that would bring about a rapid settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, concerns remain over the definition of the territories comprising the State, dividing Israelis and Palestinians. We note since then the determination to restart building settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In my delegation's view, that threatens to complicate the two-State solution of

Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.

Similarly, Hamas, which stands firm in its position of not recognizing the State of Israel, should, in our view, put aside its extremist demands and work towards unity with Fatah, which continues to state its readiness to resume talks with the State of Israel.

In the light of the prevailing situation, my country would like to reiterate that the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires direct negotiations between the two parties. Those negotiations, which had began but have been suspended for a while, must resume, under the auspices of the Quartet, in the context of establishing the State of Palestine and guaranteeing Israel its security. The international community should help the two parties to resume the negotiations process without preconditions. It can do that by calling for reactivating the Arab Peace Plan, the Madrid principles and the road map, with the support, of course, of States Members of the United Nations that have any influence on the two parties.

In Syria, the situation is becoming increasingly tragic. The violence has spread to all corners of the country, exacerbating the humanitarian situation of the refugees and displaced persons, while the civilian population sees its rights massively violated by belligerents of all sorts. The fact that the number of dead now exceeds 60,000, as has been pointed out, and that the destruction of private and State infrastructure has intensified, while diplomacy has to date not found a solution to the crisis, has only added to our frustration in view of the chaotic situation engulfing Syria brought about by its own population. In view of the evidence, it would be no exaggeration to say that the mission of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, appears destined for the same fate as that of his predecessor.

The Security Council and the international community as a whole have so far remained powerless to end the ongoing tragedy in Syria, which poses a genuine threat to humankind. Nevertheless, we believe that there is still a chance to resolve the conflict. That will necessitate unity and solidarity among the members of the Security Council, in particular the permanent members, to deal with the distressful situation of the Syrian people. In that regard, we welcome the recent initiatives taken by the United States of America and the Russian Federation, together with the Joint Special Representative, with a view to achieving a satisfactory solution. All things considered, Togo reaffirms its unwavering support for the Joint Special Representative and urges him to continue his efforts with the Council's support, which he has always asked for.

The Security Council, together with the League of Arab States, should redefine the strategies that could assist in resolving the crisis by negotiation. For all of the evidence indicates that a military victory by one of the parties would likely not lead to durable peace and security in Syria. In Togo's view, national dialogue remains necessary in creating a new, peaceful and reconciled Syria.

With regard to Lebanon, my country remains concerned about the current insecurity on the border with Syria and about the repercussions of the war in Syria on that country. That is why we condemn the killings of politicians, military personnel and innocent civilians — all victims of terrorist attacks. Such a climate of insecurity and impunity threatens the country's stability. Togo commends the efforts of the Lebanese authorities to strengthen security for its population and urges the international community, especially the Security Council, to continue to support those efforts.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his briefing. I also welcome Mr. Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, to today's meeting.

I have listened carefully to the statements made by Foreign Minister Malki and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

The question of Palestine has always been at the centre of the Middle East issue. Dialogue and negotiation remain the ultimate solution to the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, Israeli-Palestinian talks have been stalled since 2010. China is gravely concerned about that situation. The continued deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks is in the interest of neither side and will not lead to lasting peace in the Middle East. It also contravenes the common aspiration of the international community. The status quo is untenable.

The Middle East peace process must be restarted as soon as possible, in order to achieve the vision of the two-State solution. China welcomes any and all initiatives aimed at restarting the Israeli-Palestinian talks. We hope that the two sides will advance in parallel by adopting practical measures to foster a favourable environment aimed at resuming the talks and making progress at an early date.

China has consistently rejected Israel's settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the West Bank. We are also seriously concerned about Israel's suspension of tax revenue transfers to Palestine. Nevertheless, the problem of settlement activities remains the main obstacle to the resumption of the peace talks. Israel, as the more powerful party to the conflict, should take the initiative to cease its settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories, release detainees and ease the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, in order to eliminate the obstacles and create conditions favourable to the restart of the peace talks.

The international community should base its actions on the ultimate goal of achieving peace and stability in the Middle East, address the question of Israel and Palestine with greater urgency and promote the peace talks more vigorously. China appeals to the Quartet to take substantive action with a view to restarting the peace talks. China also urges all of the parties concerned to demonstrate the necessary political will. In that context, China supports the efforts of the League of Arab States and favours a greater role for the Security Council in settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is China's continued view that all of the parties concerned should settle their disputes through political dialogue based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map for peace in the Middle East, so that Israel and Palestine can eventually live side by side in peace as two States.

China supports the establishment of a sovereign, independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders. Achieving independent statehood is the legitimate right of the Palestinian people and constitutes the foundation and principles of the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel as two States. The granting of observer State status to Palestine by the General Assembly represented one more step towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

China has always promoted the peace talks in its own way, and has made efforts to advance the Middle East peace process. China would like to work with the parties concerned, together with the international community, and to continue to play a constructive role in achieving comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East region.

China is gravely concerned about the continuing tension in Syria. A political settlement is the only feasible solution to the Syrian issue and reflects the common understanding of the international community as a whole. The current urgent task requires intensifying political mediation efforts and urging all Syrian parties to cease fire and halt the violence with a view to launching a Syrian-led political process as soon as possible. China applauds all efforts aimed at promoting a political solution.

China supports the just and fair mediation efforts of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the Syrian crisis, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. We sincerely hope that all of the parties concerned will strive to find a just, peaceful and appropriate solution to the question of Syria based on the final communiqué of the Geneva meeting of the Action Group on Syria (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Kim Sook (Republic of Korea): I thank Special Coordinator Serry for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank Foreign Minister Malki and Ambassador Prosor for their warm words extended to the five new members of the Security Council, including my country.

The relationship between Israel and Palestine is still at the crux of security issues in the Middle East. However, the ongoing situation between Israel and Palestine is much worse than a simple stalemate. During the past few years, regardless of the reason, the two sides have continued to step away from implementing agreements. The violence witnessed in Gaza and in southern Israel in November 2012 was but a manifestation of that persistent feud. My delegation strongly urges both Israel and Palestine to resume direct negotiations as soon as possible. They need to sit down together to talk now. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the recent import of construction materials to the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom

checkpoint for the first time in five years. It serves to improve the living conditions of the people in Gaza. That also means that the ceasefire negotiations behind the scenes are making slow but steady progress. The negotiation process involving Egypt should contribute to building confidence between Israel and the new Egyptian Government, which is necessary to maintain their peace treaty.

On the other hand, increasing tensions and clashes in the West Bank are a worrying sign. It is of serious concern that Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation in the West Bank has continually debilitated since late last year.

My delegation watched the result of yesterday's general election in Israel with great interest. We expect that the new Israeli Government will place its priority on making progress in the Middle East talks and make sincere and serious efforts for the resumption of talks with Palestine. Also, my delegation took note of President Abbas's recent visit to Cairo and hopes that the Palestinian Authority and Hamas will work together towards reconciliation, with a view to creating an environment conducive to peace talks. Unless and until the vision of two States living peacefully side by side is embraced by all of Palestine, our common aspiration to see the State of Palestine thriving in reality will continue to remain elusive.

The Republic of Korea supports the mediation efforts by the Quartet. It was disappointing to have witnessed that little progress was made until, and even after, the deadline set by the Quartet to finalize an agreement. However, the failure to meet the time limit should not be interpreted as an indictment of the Quartet, the role of which should continue to be an integral part of the process. My delegation encourages the Quartet to renew its activities soon, and both Israel and Palestine to fully cooperate with the process.

The Republic of Korea shares with the international community its strong concerns over Israeli settlement activity. Israel, since its announcement to build 3,000 dwellings on the West Bank, including in the E-1 area, has continued to reaffirm its intention to construct additional settlements in Ramat Shlomo and Givat Hamatos. We are deeply concerned that settlements in the area between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim would jeopardize the negotiation process for a two-State solution.

In Syria the bloodshed has now entered its twenty-second month. More than 60,000 people have been killed. There are more than 650,000 refugees and an estimated 4 million people in urgent need of assistance. The Syrian authorities and the opposition groups must stop atrocities against innocent civilians. My delegation reiterates its call for all parties' cooperation for safe, unimpeded and timely humanitarian access to the people in need of help. Those who violate international humanitarian and human rights laws must be brought to justice. In that context, the Republic of Korea supports the referral of the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court.

Edmund Burke once said that all that was necessary for the triumph of evil was that good men do nothing. Continued inaction will not only result in the increase in the tragic statistics, but also fundamentally undermine peace and stability in the whole Middle East region. The deeper the grudges and grievances of Syrians against Syrians grow, the longer bloody vengeance will prevail, even after President Al-Assad steps down. Extremists are the only group that benefits from the prolongation of the conflict.

The increasingly sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict risks spreading beyond its borders. In particular, the domestic politics of Lebanon are seriously affected by the spillover from the Syrian situation. The growing number of refugees is already causing instability in the neighbouring countries. We compliment the efforts of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to continue to open their borders to accommodate Syrian refugees in spite of immense difficulties. In that regard, we hope for a successful donors conference to be held in Kuwait next week.

My delegation firmly supports the mediation efforts of Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and strongly urges all parties to cooperate fully with Mr. Brahimi.

Lastly, we warn the Syrian regime to not use chemical weapons on any occasion. The use of weapons of mass destruction will be the kiss of death for the Syrian regime. Last month at Marrakech, the Republic of Korea recognized the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. We hope that the Syrian National Coalition will begin an inclusive process of political transition with a view to winning the hearts and minds of all Syrian people. The

Republic of Korea will cooperate with other members of the Security Council to overcome its current division so that the Council can translate its Charter obligations into action and restore lasting peace in Syria.

Mr. Sharifov (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to extend to your delegation, Mr. President, our gratitude for having organized this meeting. We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, at today's meeting. We would like express our thanks for the statements made by Mr. Malki, Special Coordinator Serry and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

The situation in the Middle East continues to occupy our minds and to challenge our efforts to achieve a just and lasting solution to the persistent security issues in the region. Deeply rooted and often recurring conflicts in the Middle East, together with the new challenges brought about by the wave of transition and changes, require greater involvement and assistance on the part of the international community. Beyond conflict-resolution efforts, helping States to overcome the hardships of transformation processes is another crucial task associated with the region nowadays.

There is no shortcut to success; the road is long and bumpy. However, one should never underestimate the power of faith, allegiance and commitment, which are the staunchest allies to help overcome the trials of history and accomplish hard missions ahead. Nevertheless, however vibrant the discussions, whatever mediation efforts are needed or whatever tailored assistance might be provided by the international community, the key to solving the region's predicament lies in the political will of the leadership of the States of the region and in the cohesion within society. But that in no way absolves the international community, including the Council, of its own responsibility to protect international peace and security and to facilitate the achievement of solutions to conflict situations based on the generally accepted norms and principles of international law.

The state of the Middle East peace process remains worrisome, with no improvement. After the 21 November 2012 ceasefire there was some hope that the parties would make an attempt to move forward to solidify the existing truce and revive the peace process. We lament that that has not happened. It is clear that the longer the phase of no negotiations lasts, the further the parties will drift apart in achieving a solution. Needless to say, the achievement of peace is impossible in the absence of consist[illegible]ommitment by the parties. It is also obvious that among the necessary prerequisites for success is the need to ensure that the process and efforts are guided by the normative standards set by the Charter of the United Nations and by the objective of achieving a comprehensive settlement based on international law.

We have repeatedly stated that a lack of agreement on political issues in a situation of armed conflict and military occupation cannot be used as a pretext for disrespecting international law and human rights. Having said that, we want to express our deep concern over the continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The construction of thousands of settlement units throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is inhibiting a negotiated and peaceful solution to the conflict, as well as constituting an infringement on the rights and freedoms of the Palestinians. The recently announced settlement plan envisaging building thousands of homes in the E-1 area will, if implemented, deal a serious blow to hopes to revive the peace process and, ultimately, to achieve lasting peace in the region.

Illegal activities in the occupied territories should not be recognized under any circumstances. It is important that the international community express its strong and unified opposition to the settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory and reiterate that such activity must stop immediately and unconditionally. It is essential to underline once again that in assuming its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Council must take all the necessary measures to ensure that international law, human rights and fundamental freedoms are observed and respected at all times and without preconditions. Regional and international efforts directed towards finding a solution to this conflict, particularly those of the League of Arab States, should be commended and supported. In that regard, we welcome the convening on 9 December of the ministerial meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee in Doha, which also called for resuming negotiations between the parties.

It is also important to take full advantage of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity by promoting inter-communal dialogue and reconciliation,

while categorically rejecting and invalidating any manifestation of ethnic or religious intolerance. The humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza demands continued international attention, particularly in order to ensure the unimpeded provision of humanitarian aid throughout the region for alleviating the suffering of people in need. In that regard, we would like to announce a recent financial contribution made by the Government of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the purposes of emergency assistance in Gaza.

In conclusion, we would like once again to express our firm conviction that peace and security in the Middle East is achievable with greater political will, rigorous work and the concerted efforts of the nation, the region and the international community.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I thank Mr. Robert Serry for his detailed briefing this morning. We also welcome the Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine, His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, who has come to New York especially to attend this meeting of the Security Council.

In the past quarter, two significant developments took place. Following a spiral of violence in November, a ceasefire was agreed on between Hamas and Israel. The ceasefire is generally holding. Sporadic breaches should come to an end. And on 29 November, the General Assembly voted to make Palestine a non-member observer State (General Assembly resolution 67/19). That decision reflected the Palestinian people's greatest aspiration, supported by the vast majority of the General Assembly and the international community.

Regrettably, after that momentous development, two punitive measures were initiated against the State of Palestine by Israel: the announcement of new settlements, including in the E-1 area, and the withholding of tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority. The first measure scuttles a two-State solution; the second debilitates Palestine economically and financially. Both measures must be rolled back. They are not in the interests of regional peace and stability, nor of Israel.

We condemn the Israeli announcement that it will expand settlements. In fact, the international community is against that proposed expansion. Settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory contravenes international law, especially the Geneva Conventions. The planned settlement in the E-1 area, by connecting earlier illegal settlements with other settlements in and around East Jerusalem, would divide the West Bank into two enclaves and destroy the contiguity of the Palestinian State. It would thus render a two-State solution unworkable. The contiguity of the Palestinian State has been reaffirmed as an integral part of the peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict in the Quartet road map. All States Members of the United Nations, and especially the members of the Quartet, are therefore guarantors of a two-State solution.

World leaders have spoken against planned settlements, but so far there is only negative response from Israel. At the end of last month's consultations on the Middle East, the vast majority of Council members expressed their position on settlements at a press stakeout here. The Quartet, however, chose to remain silent. The year 2013 is crucial. If the relevant actors do not take action now, a two-State solution may not remain viable at all. It is probably the last opportunity for the international community to move towards a lasting resolution of the conflict. Procrastination in pursuing a two-State solution is leading to its erosion. Delay does not mean suspension of activity; it is tantamount to the abdication of responsibility.

We urge both the Quartet and the Security Council to display a sense of urgency. If the Quartet cannot or does not move, countries with interest and influence in the region should act to facilitate a resumption of the peace process, based on the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. A resumption of the peace process, however, should mean action with clear benchmarks and deadlines. A comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East cannot be assured without Israel's withdrawal from all occupied lands, including those of Lebanon and the Syrian Golan. The Security Council must also ensure and monitor the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), as well as other relevant resolutions. The illegal blockade of Gaza and the collective punishment of its population must cease.

Peace in the Middle East has remained a dream for six decades. A solution based on two States is not an issue for the Palestinians alone. A single State would also mean a demographic imbalance for Israel, as well as continued strife, volatility and suffering. Peace would remain elusive. The best course of action for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict lies in

establishing an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Two States, living side by side in peace and security, is the goal that we ought to pursue single-mindedly.

Let me now turn to Syria. As Syria descends into deeper conflict, racked by internecine violence, the humanitarian crisis there continues to grow exponentially. There are pronouncements and protestations by the international community to the effect that it must respond swiftly to stop the killings and move the Syrian nation — Government and opposition — towards dialogue and a political process. But beyond political rhetoric, there is no progress towards engagement. The only realities are continuing carnage and political stalemate. The Security Council itself remains immobilized.

The Secretary-General and Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi have used their political capital and clout to persuade the parties, countries of the region and Council members to evolve a common platform for ending the vicious cycle of violence in Syria. Diplomacy is all about hope, so we must not lose hope. We need a ray of hope, a breakthrough, a process that brings Syria and the region out of this quagmire. The levers for a breakthrough are self-evident.

First, both the Syrian Government and the opposition have to change their mind-set that they can win this bloody war militarily. Secondly, engagement is the only viable path, and it is the only viable option before the parties. They have to move towards each other. They have to move towards common ground. Thirdly, the regional Powers and key Council members need to persuade Damascus and the opposition to renounce violence and come to the negotiating table. In this conflict, the Syrian people as a whole are losing, but nobody is winning. Fourthly, the supply of arms must be stopped forthwith. We know from our recent historical experience that the supply of arms to groups advocating and practising different brands of extremism can have unintended consequences. An apparent quick fix today could be a nightmare for national and international actors tomorrow as multiple regions are plunged into an even greater period of volatility. Fifthly, humanitarian access needs to be improved to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

Finally, we fully support the diplomatic efforts being made by Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. We wish him success. We want diplomacy to succeed.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to request all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with longer statements are requested to kindly circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): I would like to first thank Mr. Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing. Allow me also to also warmly welcome His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine. We are delighted that Mr. Malki is here today, but we are even more delighted that the name plate of State of Palestine is here for the first time, and here to stay, as an expression of the international will to recognize Palestinian statehood.

Indeed, it is a major leap in the uphill battle of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable national rights. However, we are not even half way there. Palestine could only be granted observer status by virtue of General Assembly resolution 67/19. But like any other peace-loving State, it should be granted full membership in the Organization. Therefore, we truly hope that, sooner rather than later, the Council, based on Article 4 of the Charter of the United Nations, will recommend to the General Assembly the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

Most important, the State of Palestine remains occupied. It is our duty — the duty of the international community — to help it put an end to occupation and to achieve real independence. Then, and only then, can we have a genuine and lasting peace in that part of the world.

You, Mr. President, and your 14 colleagues around this table all know that there is no greater obstacle towards such a noble end than the unrelenting Israeli policy of settlement in the territory occupied since 1967. Time and again, the question of the illegality of settlement activity has been stressed in the Council. I see no need to demonstrate it anew. Yet, for whoever may still have any doubt on the matter, let me only recall that one of the first people to recognize the

illegality of such activity was no one other than Mr. Theodor Meron, a child survivor of the Holocaust who became one of the world's most eminent international jurists and was recently elected President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Mr. Meron was the Legal Counsel of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 1967. He was asked by the Office of Mr. Levy Eshkol, then Prime Minister of Israel, for his opinion on the legality of civilian settlements in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. In a cover note dated September 18, 1967 to the legal memorandum that he submitted on the matter, Mr. Meron summarized his conclusions as follows: "civilian settlement in the administered territories contravenes the explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention."

In the text of his memorandum, the Legal Counsel of the Israeli Foreign Ministry is unequivocally clear that the Geneva Convention prohibition on the occupying Power to deport or transfer parts of its civilian population into the territory it occupies is a prohibition that is "categorical and not conditional upon the motives for the transfer or its objectives. Its purpose is to prevent settlement in occupied territory of citizens of the occupying state".

There is no need to dwell then any longer on the legal aspect of settlements, I assume. Let me, then, turn to the political effects of settlements and how they prejudice the prospects for peace negotiations. To that effect, most telling is a quote from Amos Elon, the late Israeli journalist, essayist and author, who was referred to in a *New York Times* obituary as a cultural giant who was for many years Israel's "most renowned public intellectual". Stressing how detrimental to the prospects of peace the settlements could be, he wrote in a 19 December 2002 essay in the *New York Review of Books*:

> "Imagine the effect on the peace process in Northern Ireland if the British government continued moving thousands of Protestants from Scotland into Ulster and settling them, at government expense, on land confiscated from Irish Catholics."

To help assess the magnitude of the ongoing settlement activity, let me underline here that approvals of settlement plans jumped 300 per cent in 2012, and that, in just one week of December of that year, the Israeli Government pushed forward plans for over 11,000 homes beyond the 1967 border — nearly as many settler homes as were approved in the previous 10 years combined, as clearly demonstrated by the Israeli Peace Now movement. A copy of the alarming report released by that group one week ago, on 16 January, detailing the record of Prime Minister Netanyahu's Government on settlements over the course of its full term in office, that is from April 2009 to the present, can be found at www.peacenow.org.

Yet, no less alarming than that unprecedented level of settlement activity is the strategic location for the recently approved construction plans. In that regard, the case of the E-1 area is most indicative. According to the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, if built, the 3,426 housing units that were approved on 5 December 2012 for the E-1 area

> "will exacerbate the isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, will interrupt the territorial contiguity between the northern and southern parts of the West Bank and will create a physical and functional barrier between East Jerusalem and the Palestinian population in adjacent West Bank communities for which the city serves as the main metropolitan and religious centre".

For the Israeli non-governmental organization Terrestrial Jerusalem, E-1

> "is not a routine settlement. If built, it is a game-changer, maybe a game-ender. E-1 is the binary settlement. If you support E-1, you cannot possibly be in favour of the two-State solution; if you are in favour of the two-State solution, you must oppose E-1".

For those who brush off criticism of E-1 by insisting that Israel is not pursuing construction and that it is just planning, the non-governmental organization Terrestrial Jerusalem is right to remind us that

> "when approved, Israel asserts a plan is 'only planning'; when implemented, 'it is not new'. By now, anyone hearing this refrain should immediately understand: Israeli planning in settlements equals Israeli construction in settlements, sooner rather than later".

Surely the Council will recall that, on 11 January, a group of around 200 young Palestinians set up tents in parts of the E-1 area and announced the establishment of a village dubbed Bab Al-Shams — "Gate of the Sun" — after the novel by the internationally renowned

Lebanese writer Elias Khoury, observing that "the time has now come to change the rules of the game, for us to establish facts on the ground — our own land". Before their eviction two days later by the occupying forces, Khoury addressed them from Beirut with the following words:

> "When you built your wonderful village you gave back meaning to meaning. You became the sons of this land and its masters ...
>
> "You are the olives of Palestine that shine under the sun of justice, and as you build your village, the light of freedom flares up with you.
>
> "Light upon light".

Borrowing the words of my fellow countryman, I will conclude by saying that it is also high time for the Council to give meaning to meaning by living up to its responsibilities under the Charter and putting an end by all legal means to the illegal settlement activity in the occupied territory.

The President: There are still a number of speakers on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.